



## THE GEOLOGY AND GEOTHERMAL ACTIVITY OF THE EAST AFRICAN RIFT

**Peter A. Omenda**

Geothermal Development Company

P.O. Box 100746, Nairobi 00101

KENYA

*pomenda@gdc.co.ke*

### ABSTRACT

The East Africa Rift System is a classical continental rift system associated with the world-wide mid ocean rift systems. The rift extends from the Red Sea – Afar triple junction through Ethiopian highlands, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi to Mozambique in the south. The western branch passes through Uganda, DRC and Rwanda while the nascent south-western branch runs through Luangwa and Kariba rifts in Zambia into Botswana. The volcanic and tectonic activity in the rift started about 30 million years ago and in the eastern branch the activity involved faulting and eruption of large volumes of mafic and silicic lavas and pyroclastics. The western branch, typified by paucity of volcanism, is younger and dominated by faulting that has created deep basins currently filled with lakes and sediments.

Geothermal activity in the rift is manifested by the occurrences of Quaternary volcanoes, hot springs, fumaroles, boiling pools, hot and steaming grounds, geysers and sulphur deposits. The manifestations are abundant and stronger in the eastern branch that encompasses Afar, Ethiopian and Kenya rifts while in the western branch, the activity is subdued and occurs largely as hot springs and fumaroles. Detailed and reconnaissance studies of geothermal potential in Eastern Africa indicates that the region has potential of over 15,000MW<sub>e</sub>.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The East African rift system is widely recognized as the classical example of a continental rift system which is part of the Afro Arabian rift system that extends from the Red Sea to Mozambique in the south. As the rift extends from the Ethiopian segment southwards it bifurcates at about 5°N into the Eastern and Western branches. The two branches of the rift skirts around the Tanzania craton and formed within the Late Proterozoic belts adjacent to the margins of the craton (Mosley, 1993 and Smith and Mosley, 1993). However, the Eastern Branch that comprises the Ethiopian and Kenya rifts is older and relatively more volcanically active than the western branch that comprises Albert–Tanganyika-Rukwa-Malawi rifts.

In the rift axis of the eastern branch occurs numerous central volcanoes of Quaternary age overlying products of Miocene and Pliocene volcanism. The shield volcanoes are built largely of intermediate lavas and the associated pyroclastics, thus indicating the presence of shallow hot bodies (magma chambers). In the Western Branch, there is paucity of volcanism along the entire length of the rift with the main volcanic areas being Virunga and Rungwe. The geothermal activity in the East African

rift occurs in the form of hot springs, fumaroles, hot and altered grounds is closely associated with Quaternary volcanoes in the axis of the rifts. The association is related to the shallow hot magma bodies under the massifs, which are the heat sources. In the Afar rift where the crust is as thin as 5km, extensive manifestations and high heat flux is due to a combination of mantle heat and magma bodies occurring at shallow depths. In the less magmatic western branch of the rift, heat sources could be combination of buried pluton and high heat flux associated with thinned crust.

Using today's technologies, Eastern Africa has the potential to generate over 15,000 MW of energy from geothermal power. Despite this potential, only Kenya and Ethiopia have active geothermal generation of 209 MW and 7.2 MW, respectively. Varying degrees of geothermal exploration and research have been undertaken in Djibouti, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi. The potential to use geothermal energy for grid-connected electrification is greatest in Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. In addition, all the countries have the potential to use geothermal energy for grid connected electrification.

## 2. GEOTHERMAL ACTIVITY

### 2.1 General

East African rift system (EARS) is a succession of rift valleys that extend from Beira in Mozambique in the south to Afar triangle in the north; a total distance of more than 4,000-km. The EARS is a continental branch of the worldwide mid ocean rift system that corresponds to the third arm of the Afar- Red Sea – Gulf of Aden triple junction. The rift is assumed to mark the incipient plate boundary between the Somali and Nubian micro-plates and linked to the Afar- Red Sea – Gulf of Aden rift systems (Figure 1). The EARS splits into two at about 5°N to form the Eastern and Western branches. The Eastern branch comprises the Afar, Ethiopian, Turkana and Kenya Rifts while the western branch comprises Albert, Kivu, Tanganyika, Rukwa and Malawi Rifts. The SW branch comprises Luangwa-Kariba-Okavango rifts.

The standard model for active rift formation involves lithospheric extension accompanied by upwelling of the underlying asthenospheric mantle (Figure 2). Decompression of the asthenosphere results in large volumes of magma generation. Further brittle extension of the crust results in down faulting and formation of the

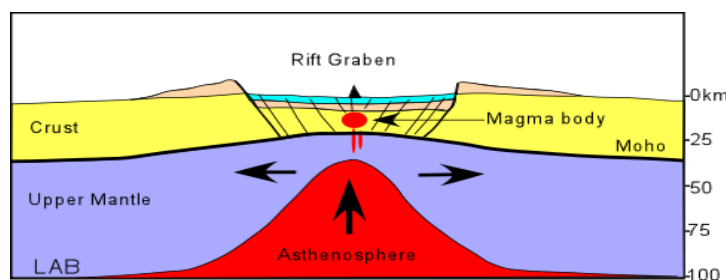


FIGURE 2: Generalized E-W section across a typical continental rift showing late stages of its formation

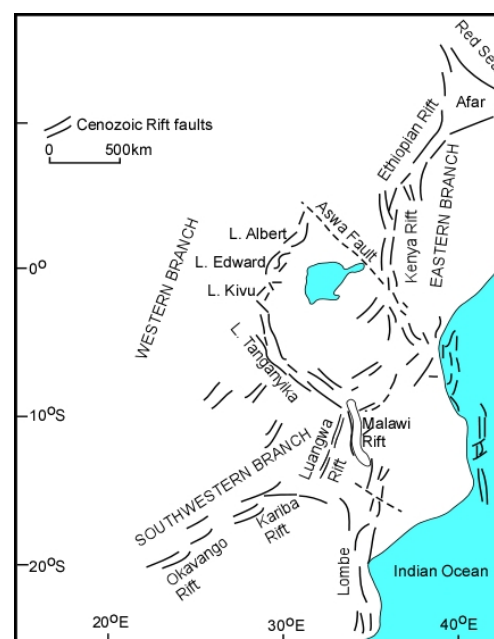


FIGURE 1: Structural map showing the East African Rift System (Modified from Atekwana et al., 2004)

graben. In the case of the EARS, extensions is more active in the north being more than 2cm/year in the Red Sea – Gulf of Aden, 1 mm/year in the Main Ethiopian Rift, and further less than 1mm/year in the Kenya Rift and southwards. In response to the increased extension in the EARS, the Moho is at between 5 and 35 km along the axis of the rift.

## 2.2 The Ethiopian Rift

The Main Ethiopian Rift (MER) and Afar Rift represent the northernmost part of the East African Rift (Figures 2 and 3). Volcanic activity in Ethiopia started about 30 million years ago with uplift followed by eruption of large volumes of basalts (Mohr and Zanettin, 1988). However, activity has reduced since the Miocene times with eruptions of bimodal suite of basalts and more alkaline silicic lavas concentrated within the rift zone. More recent activity in the axis of the rift consisted of rhyolite volcanoes and domes as well as ignimbrites and non-consolidated pyroclastics. Studies by Mohr (1992) indicate that over 90% of the eruptives are of silicic composition. In the axis of the rift occurs the Wonji fault belt, which is a region of Quaternary crustal extension. The fault zone is offset in several locations along its length and some of the large volcanoes including Aluto are located at the fault intersections (Figure 3).

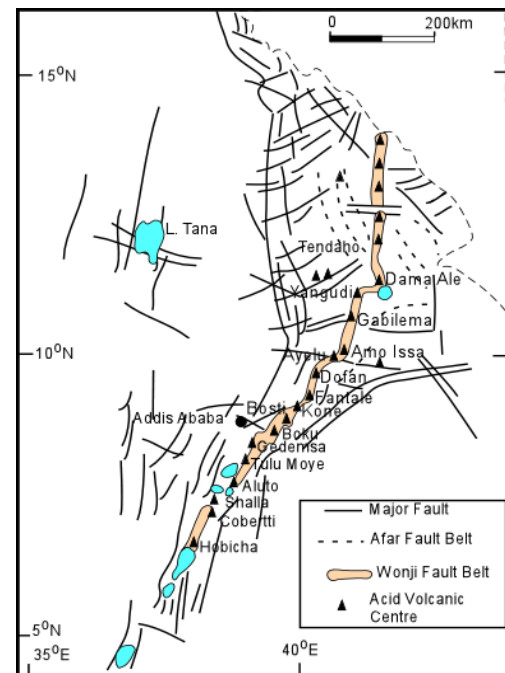


FIGURE 3: Structural map of the Ethiopian Rift showing locations of Quaternary volcanoes (From Abebe, 2000)

The Afar rift is the most active segment of the entire EARS with Erta Ale volcano being presently active. The Afar rift floor is dotted with a large number of rhyolitic volcanoes in the south and more basaltic centres in the north. The surface geology in the south is similar to that of the MER where ignimbrites are abundant while in the north basalt sheets of Quaternary age dominate. The volcanics overlie older sedimentary rocks in the Afar rift zone.

Geothermal manifestations occur as fumaroles, altered grounds, steaming grounds and hot springs in many locations, most of which are associated with young volcanic fields in the rift valley. Hot springs also occur on the flanks of the rift where they are associated with Tertiary faulting episodes. The manifestations are more pronounced and vigorous within the axis of the rifts than on the flanks due to the favourable hydrology and relatively shallow heat sources. The heat sources for the geothermal systems are related to (1) shallow magma chambers associated with the young rhyolite volcanoes that are common in the southern Afar and MER and (2) upper mantle intrusion/upwelling associated with the thin crust in the area that averages between 5 and 20 km.

### 2.2.1 Djibouti

Djibouti lies at the Afar triple junction of three active, major coastal spreading centres: (a) the Eastern Africa Rift zone; (b) The Gulf of Aden Rift; and (c) the Red sea Rift (Figures 1, 3 and 4). In Djibouti, areas of strong manifestations are located within the Asal and Hanle rifts in the Afar Depression (Mohamed, 2004). According to a recent study by the Geothermal Energy Association (GEA, 1999), the geothermal potential in Djibouti is between 230-860 MW<sub>e</sub> from a number of prospects including: Lake Lake Asal, Abhe, Hanle, Gaggade, Arta, Tadjourah, Obock and Dorra.

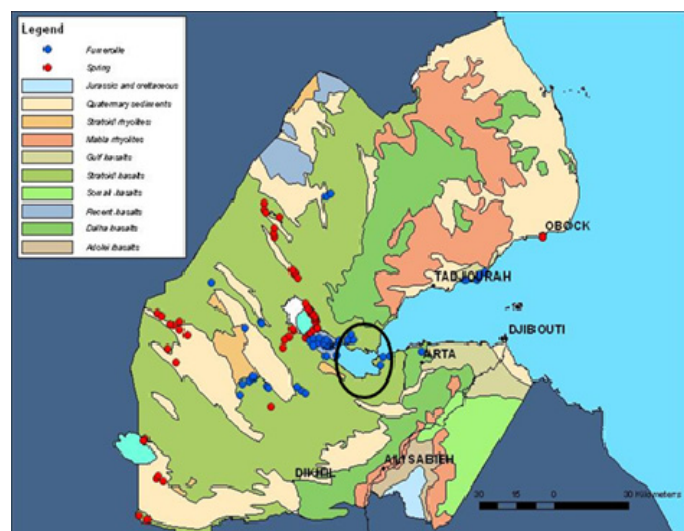


FIGURE 4: Map of Djibouti showing geothermal areas



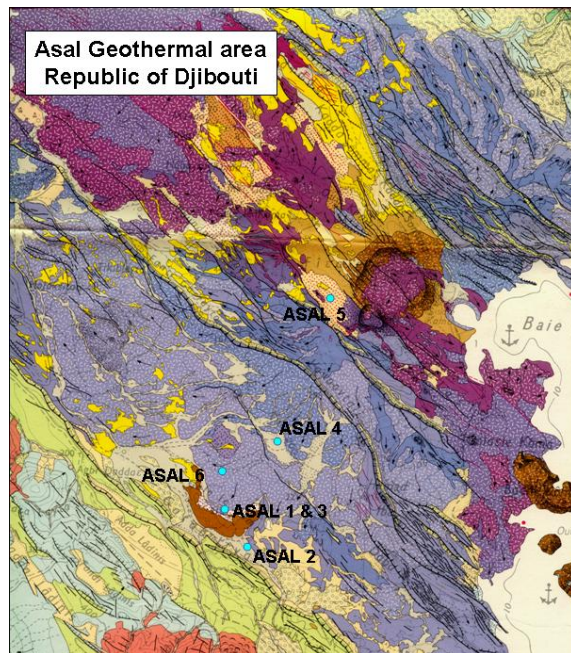


FIGURE 5: Map of Lake Asal geothermal field showing exploratory wells

Much effort has been expended in Djibouti since the 1970's, in view of the country being deficient of indigenous energy resources. Djibouti's current energy production is by fossil fuels. The first concerted effort to assess and explore Djibouti's geothermal resources took place in the Assal area from 1970-83 and funded by the French government. About six exploratory wells were drilled in the Assal geothermal fields (Figure 5). While a very high temperature system has been successfully located, problems related to high salinity of the discovered fluids, which is due to the close proximity of the field to the Gulf of Aden, has delayed resource development and exploitation (Teklemariam, 2005).

The other promising prospect is at Hanle which lies south-west of the country between Lake Abhé and Lake Asal. Several fumaroles and hot springs are identified in the area and detailed studies are planned in the future.

### 2.2.2 Eritrea

In 1973 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), identified a potentially significant exploitable geothermal resources in Eritrea. In 1995 with help of USGS, Eritrea identified the Alid geothermal prospect area for follow up detailed investigations. This area is located about 120km south of Massawa (Figure 6)

Alid Volcanic center is the better studied of all geothermal areas in Eritrea. The geothermal prospect lies within the Danakil Depression and is characterized by a rhyolitic domal intrusion which is considered to be the main heat source for the geothermal system. Manifestations occur in the form of boiling pools, hot springs, and fumaroles (Woldegiorgis et al., 2003). Detailed geoscientific investigations revealed a potential reservoir temperature of about 250°C. However, exploratory drilling is yet to be undertaken in the prospect.

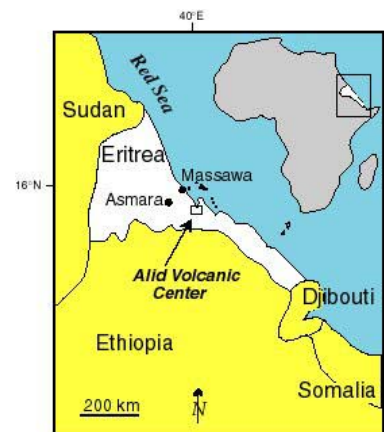


FIGURE 6: Map showing the location of Alid volcanic centre in Eritrea

### 2.2.3 Ethiopia

Ethiopia started a long-term geothermal exploration undertaking in 1969. Over the years a good inventory of the possible resource areas has been built up and a number of the more important sites have been explored in the Ethiopian Rift Valley. Of these areas, about sixteen are judged to have potential for high temperature steam suitable for conventional electricity generation (Figures 3 and 7).

Exploration work peaked during the early to mid-1980s when exploration drilling was carried out at the Aluto-Langano geothermal field, Lakes District Eight deep exploratory wells were drilled to a maximum depth of about 2500m, and four were found to be productive with a maximum geothermal reservoir temperature of about 350°C.

During the early 1990s exploration drilling was also carried out at Tendaho (Northern Afar). Three deep (2100m) and three shallow wells (500m) confirmed the existence of, a high temperature (270°C)

reservoir. The Aluto-Langano geothermal field was handed over to the Ethiopian Electric Power Company (EEPCo) for development in the year 1996 but utilization was delayed until 1998 when the first 7.2MW<sub>e</sub> pilot power plant was built.

Feasibility study for the expansion of the Aluto Langano Geothermal power has been recently completed with the Japanese Overseas Development Assistance. The study indicated expansion of the Aluto Geothermal power to additional 35MWe is feasible. Accordingly, as an initial step to develop the 35MWe, it is planned to drill four deep appraisal wells in 2011 with the Japanese technical assistance and the World Bank. By 2012 it is planned to generate 75 MWe of geothermal power from Aluto Langano and by 2018 it is anticipated to generate a total of 450 MWe from the other geothermal areas in the Rift.

### 2.3 The Kenya Rift

The Kenya rift is the segment that extends from Lake Turkana to northern Tanzania. The formation of the Kenya rift started about early Miocene in the north around Lake Turkana and migrated southwards being active from about middle to late Miocene in the central segment. The development of the rift occurred largely within the Late Proterozoic basement of Mozambique belt and close to the eastern margin of the Tanzania craton.

The formation of the rift started by up doming and volcanism on the crest of uplift and followed by faulting to form a half graben. The formation of a full graben occurred during the early Pleistocene, on the floor was erupted lava flows of basaltic and trachytic composition, and intercalated with tuffs. Subsequently, sheet trachytes were grid faulted with dominant north-south closely spaced faults. The Quaternary times saw the development of many large shield volcanoes of silicic composition in the axis of the rift.

Activity in the southern extreme of Kenya and northern Tanzania segment of the Kenya rift is dominated by alkaline and carbonatitic volcanism of which Ol'Doinyo Lengai is well known. Prevalence of the carbonatites in the region is attributed to deep source of the lavas occasioned by the thick cratonic crust in the region. Alkaline lavas are predominant in the areas around Kilimanjaro where micro- rift grabens occur near Arusha and further south.

The entire length of the Kenya rift from Lake Turkana in the north to northern Tanzania has young volcanoes dominantly of silicic composition in its axis. The youthfulness of the volcanoes attests to active magmatism under the rift. Similarly, geothermal manifestations are more abundant and stronger within the rift and in many cases they are associated with the young Quaternary volcanoes (Figure 8).

Geothermal manifestations in the Kenya rift include fumaroles, hot springs, spouting springs, hot and altered grounds and solfatara (sulphur deposits). Fumaroles commonly occur on the mountains while

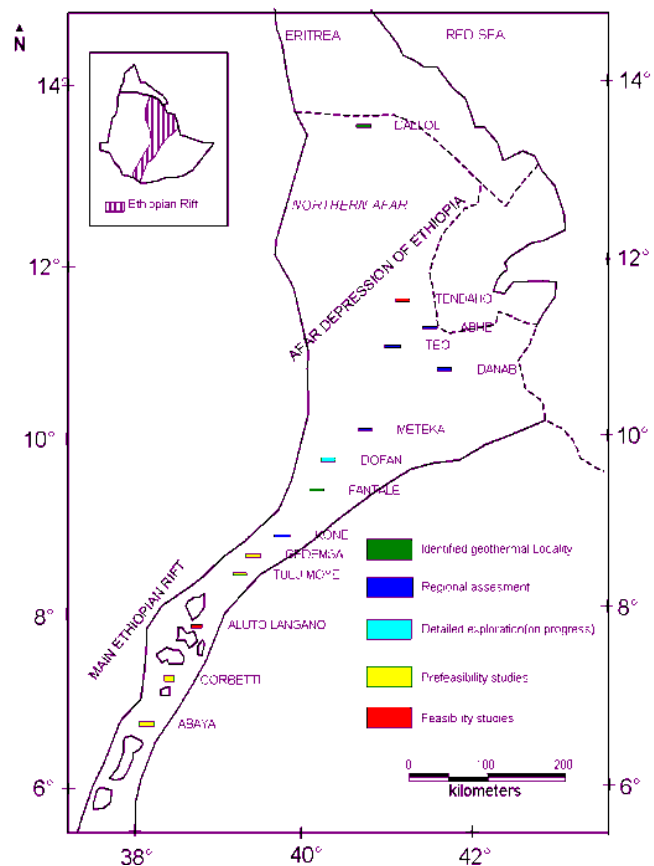


FIGURE 7: Location map of the geothermal areas in the Ethiopian Rift

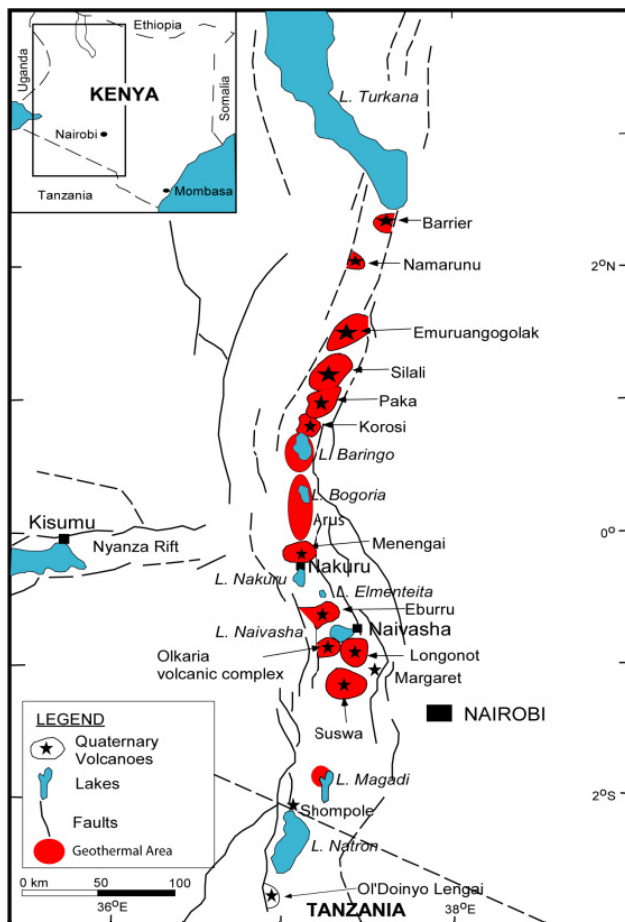


FIGURE 8: Map of the Kenya rift showing the locations of geothermal areas

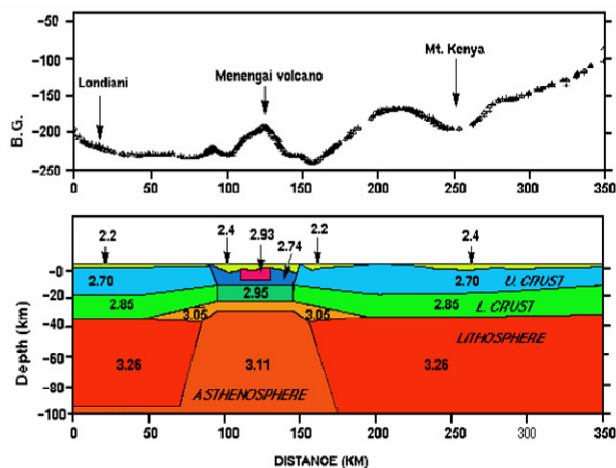


FIGURE 9: E-W Gravity model across Menengai Menengai volcano (After Simiyu, 1996)

of volcanism relative to the Kenyan and Ethiopian rifts. Whereas the volcanism and tectonic activity in eastern branch commenced about 30 million years ago in the eastern branch of the rift, volcanic activity in the western branch commenced about 12 Ma in the north near Lake Albert and about 7 Ma in the Tanganyika rift (Ebinger, 1989).

hot springs and geysers are common on the lowlands. Sulphur deposits have been observed at several geothermal areas including Olkaria, Paka and Barrier volcanoes where it is indicative of the presence of a degassing magma body at depth. Extinct manifestations in the form of travertine deposits, silica veins and chloritized zones are common in the Lakes Baringo – Bogoria regions indicating long-lived geothermal activity in the rift.

Of these areas, Olkaria has been developed for electricity generation (209MW<sub>e</sub>) while a pilot plant is planned for Eburru (2.5MW<sub>e</sub>). Both the Olkaria and Eburru geothermal systems are volcano hosted resources and thus, the heat driving the systems are associated with hot intrusive bodies under the volcanic complexes. Gravity and seismic have imaged dense bodies under the volcanoes (Figure 9).

Detailed investigations recently concluded in Menengai, Korosi, Paka and Lakes Baringo and Bogoria geothermal prospects reveal the possible existence of geothermal systems. High temperatures systems possibly exist at Menengai, Paka and Korosi while low to medium temperatures resources could be associated with the systems around Lakes Baringo and Bogoria. Exploratory drilling is planned for Menengai prospect in 2011. It is estimated that over 7,000 MW<sub>e</sub> can be generated from the geothermal systems in the Kenya rift. It is notable that in Kenya other than electricity production, geothermal water and carbon dioxide are used in an extensive complex of green houses for growing roses at Olkaria.

## 2.4 Western Branch

The western branch of the rift runs along the western side of Lake Victoria and along the edge of the East African plateau (Figure 10). The geography of the western branch is typically half grabens characterized by the high angle normal rift faults. The western branch of the rift is characterized by paucity



The northern zones of the rift comprise several basins that define the Albertine Graben near Lake Albert. The Lake Albert rift was initiated early Miocene and is dominated by thick sequence of sediments and is largely non magmatic except for the southern basins where volcanic products occur. The Albertine basin is also thought to have petroleum potential. The western branch is characterized by the abundance of potassic alkaline rocks that consists of carbonatites, ultrapotassic mafic rocks and potassic mafic-felsic lava. Volcanic activity is more intense in the Virunga volcanic field where Nyiragongo and Nyamuragira in the DR Congo are active with basaltic eruptives.

The Tanganyika–Rukwa–Malawi (TRM) segment of the western branch follows the fabric of the basement structures inherited from the Proterozoic period. The rift is characterized by normal boundary faults, which define half grabens, horsts and step faults with riftward tilted blocks and monoclinical structures. The Malawi segment extends south to the Urema and Lebombo grabens in southern Mozambique. Within the rifts occur lakes Tanganyika and Malawi, which are deep sedimentary basins. The rift segment is largely non-magmatic during the Quaternary times with volcanic fields being only at Rungwe between lakes Tanganyika and Rukwa. Late Cenozoic volcanism started about 9-7 Ma ago in the Rungwe volcanic province where the rift follows the NE-SW trend in line with the Kenya rift. The volcanic products include Quaternary mafic and felsic rocks.

Whereas there is paucity of recent volcanism in this segment of the rift, geothermal activity is still evident in many localities. The manifestations in the Tanganyika-Rukwa-Malawi Rift include hot springs and fumaroles at temperatures of up to 86°C which occur at Mbeya where they are closely associated with the Quaternary Rungwe volcanic field. The area is also characterized by high seismicity signifying that the area is still tectonically and magmatically active. Other hot springs occurring in Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique are fault controlled and are associated with the border faults. The hot springs are probably due to deep circulation of ground waters through the rift structures.

#### 2.4.1 Tanzania

Geothermal exploration in Tanzania was carried out between 1976-79 by SWECO, a Swedish consulting group, in collaboration with Virkir-Orkint (Iceland), with financial support from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). Reconnaissance studies for surface exploration were carried out in the north (near Arusha, Lake Natron, Lake Manyara and Maji Moto) and in the south (Figure 11). Geothermal work in all locations in Tanzania is at the surface exploration stage.

Two potential target areas for geothermal exploration singled out so far are: (a) Arusha region near the Kenyan border in the North; and (b) Mbeya region between Lake Rukwa and Lake Nyasa in the southwest. Another potential area (Luhoi) was prospected during 1998-2002 by First Energy Company of Tanzania. It conducted important project definition and reconnaissance evaluation work. This area is located 160 km south of Dar es Salaam. The work conducted so far indicates the existence of a possible geothermal system with reservoir temperature greater than 200°C. In northern Tanzania, geothermal activity occurs mainly along the southern extension of the Kenya rift into L

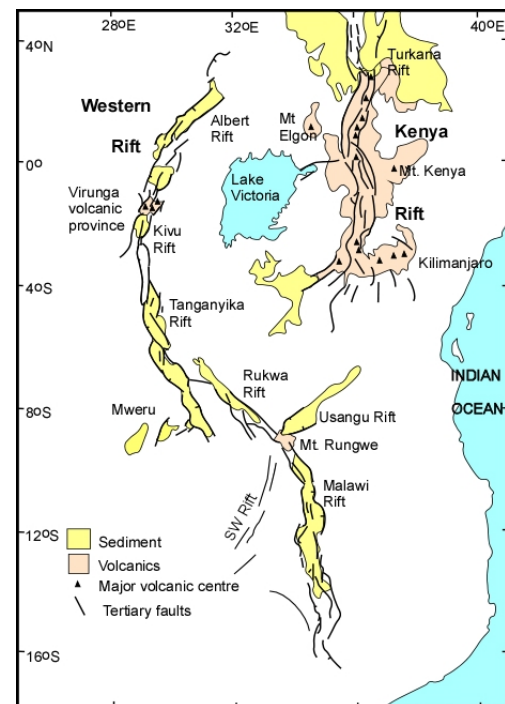


FIGURE 10: Map showing the structural relationship between the Eastern (Kenya) and Western branches of the EA Rift system

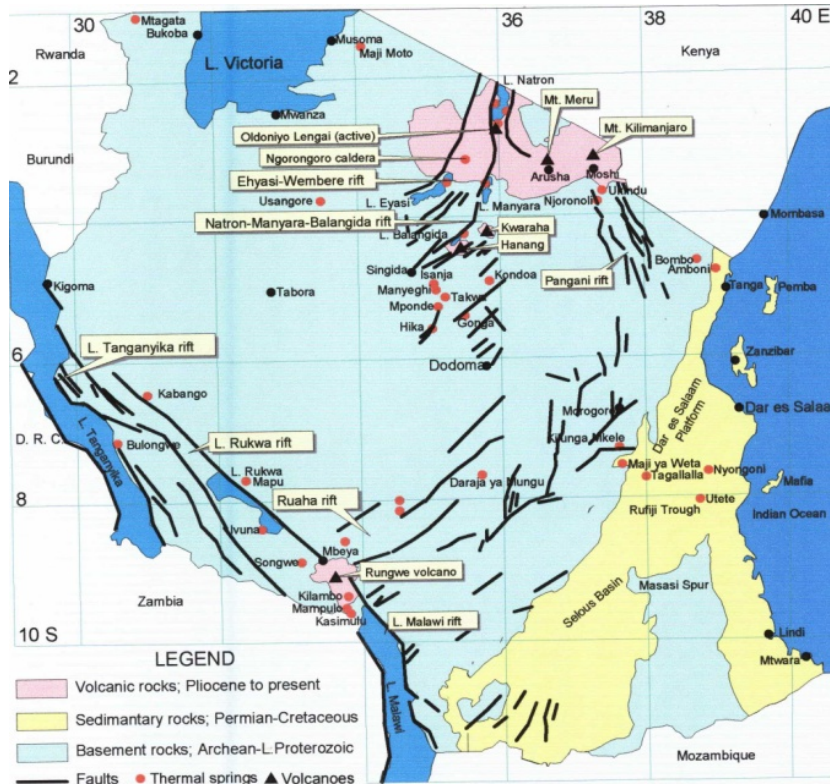


FIGURE 11: Map of Tanzania showing the location of geothermal areas



FIGURE 12: Map of Uganda showing the location of geothermal areas

Eyasi, Ngorongoro, L. Natron, Ol'Doinyo Lengai and Arusha areas. Other low temperature manifestations occur in central and south east Tanzania in Singida and Rufiji areas.

#### 2.4.2 Uganda

Reconnaissance survey has been carried out on geothermal areas of Uganda since 1935 when the first documentation of hot springs was made (Bahati and Tuhumwire, 2002). The geothermal activity is restricted largely to the areas within the western rift valley. Geothermal manifestations in the form of fumaroles and hot springs occur along some of the border faults of the rift valley and within the volcanic fields. The main geothermal areas are Katwe-Kikorongo (Katwe), Buranga and Kibiro. They are all located in the Albertine graben that runs along the border of Uganda with the Democratic Republic of Congo (Figure 12). The Albertine graben is part of the western branch of the East African Rift System in Uganda, commonly known as the Western Rift Valley.

Fault controlled manifestations occur at Buranga at the foot of Ruwenzori massif as well as at Kibiro near Lake Albert. The manifestations at Buranga discharge at boiling point while travertine deposits have also been noted in several localities (Bahati, 2003).

Buranga has the most impressive surface geothermal manifestations



(hot springs) in the whole of the western branch of the East African Rift System with a wide areal coverage. They include hot springs, calcareous tufa and recent surveys have reported small-scale fumaroles at the Mumbuga spring area. The surface temperature is close to 98°C and the flow is approximately 10-15 l/s (Bahati, 2008). Geothermometry at Buranga prospect recorded temperatures of 120-150°C.

The geothermal surface manifestations in the Katwe prospect are hot springs located in the Lake Kitagata crater, and warm springs and travertine deposits that have built up tufas in the Lake Katwe crater, which is located 12 km southwest of Lake Kitagata. The maximum surface temperatures in the hot springs in Lake Kitagata crater is 70 C, while in Lake Katwe crater it is 32°C (Bahati, 2008). At Katwe, fluid geothermometric temperatures of 160-200°C was estimated from fluids.

The geothermal surface manifestations in the Kibiro geothermal prospect are mainly concentrated at Kibiro and Kachuru, west of the escarpment, on the shores of Lake Albert. They comprise hot and warm springs at Kibiro, and deposits of sulphur at Kachuru (Bahati, 2008). The hot springs at Kibiro are related to a secondary fault, oblique to the main Rift fault, and controlled by the intersection of the two (Bahati, 2008). The total flow measured from the hot springs is approximately 7 l/s and the maximum surface temperature is 86.4 C Kibiro prospect has a relatively simple geologic structure and waters indicative of subsurface temperatures of above 200°C.

Shallow Temperature gradient wells were drilled in Kibiro and Katwe prospects in 2008 to between 200 to 300m depth. Shallow geothermal reservoirs were not encountered by the wells. Uganda Government has planned to re evaluate the results of the temperature gradient and surface studies with a view to siting exploration wells in the most promising prospects.

### **2.4.3 Rwanda**

Virunga geothermal prospect in Rwanda lies within the Virunga volcanic province within the western arm of the East African Rift System. The geography of the western branch is typically half graben characterized by high angle normal rift faults. The western branch of the rift in Rwanda is characterized by paucity of volcanism relative to the Kenyan and Ethiopian rifts.

Whereas the volcanism and tectonic activity in eastern branch commenced about 30 million years ago in the eastern branch of the rift, volcanic activity in the western branch commenced about 12 Ma in the north near Lake Albert and about 7 Ma in the Tanganyika rift (Ebinger, 1989).

The western branch is characterized by the abundance of potassic alkaline rocks that consists of K-basanites, leucitites, nephelinites, K-mugearites, K-benmoreiites and K-trachytes and other intermediate lavas in the Virunga area. Volcanic activity is also more intense in the Virunga volcanic field where Nyiragongo and Nyamuragira have erupted in the recent past. Quaternary volcanoes in the area include Karisimbi, Bisoke, Miken, Sabinyo, Gahinga and Muhabura in the northern part of the prospect (Figure 13). The western part of the prospect is dominated by mafic and intermediate lavas of Tertiary age that predominantly originated from Karisimbi and Nyiragongo volcanoes. These lavas flowed and partially filled the Lake Kivu and Kamatembe basins.

Paucity of volcanism in the western rift relative to the eastern branch is reflected in the low volumes of the eruptive products from the volcanoes in the region. It is therefore estimated that the thickness of the eruptives is less than 1-km in most areas in Virunga. The thin volcanic cover is underlain by Proterozoic metamorphic rocks.

In 2006, investigations were undertaken by the American company, Chevron, on the Mashyuza and Gisenyi prospects. Eighteen hydrothermal and mineralized springs were mapped and analysed. Geothermometers applied by BRGM and Chevron indicated reservoir temperatures of between 150°C – 210°C. From these investigations, three prospective sites (Karisimbi, Mashyuza and

Ntaresi) were identified for further detailed investigations with the first major focus on the areas south, southwest and southeast of the Karisimbi volcano within the Virunga volcanic province.

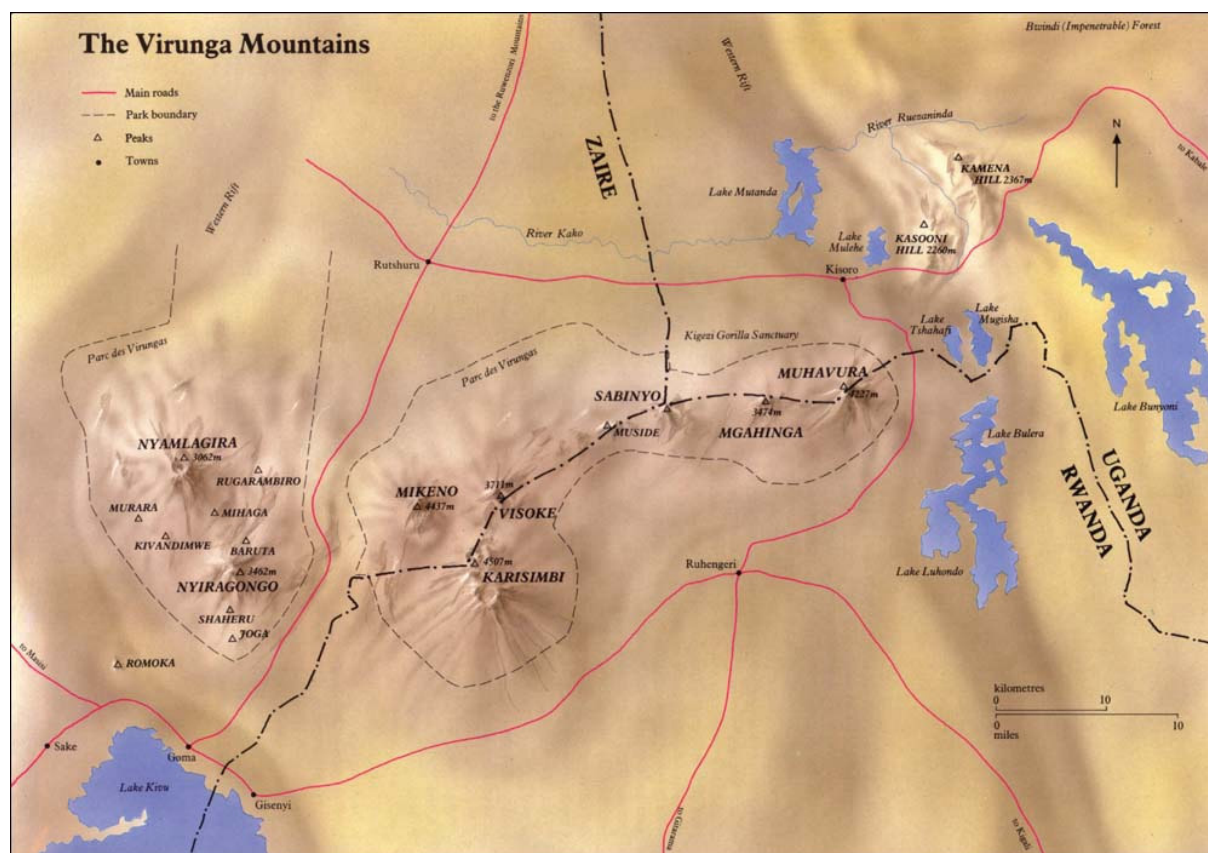


FIGURE 13: Map of Virunga Volcanic Complex prepared from satellite imagery (from [http://volcano.oregonstate.edu/volcanoes/volc\\_images/Africa/karisimbi.html](http://volcano.oregonstate.edu/volcanoes/volc_images/Africa/karisimbi.html))

Geothermal manifestations are marked by warm and hot springs within the study area. The springs mainly occur within the basement formation and at the rift margin. The hottest spring with a temperature of about 75°C, is located at the NE shores of Lake Kivu and is classified as bicarbonate water. Studies by Newell et al. (2006) indicated that the reservoir temperature of the Gisenyi hot springs could be between 150°C and 210°C. The other hot spring (64°C) is at the vicinity of Lake Karago in the south-east of the study area. Several other warm and cold springs show evidence of gaseous emissions.

Preliminary MT results indicate a low resistivity anomaly, covering an area of about 50 km<sup>2</sup>, at south of Karisimbi volcano (Fig. 14). The anomaly is interpreted to reflect the occurrence of a high temperature geothermal system on the southern slopes of Karisimbi volcano. The heat source is closely associated with the latest phases of trachytic magmatism at Karisimbi. The reservoir temperature is believed to be more than 210°C as discussed by Newell et al. (2006). It is also interpreted that a smaller, medium temperature geothermal systems exists along the NE trending accommodation zone west of Mukamira.

The Government of Rwanda intends to undertake further geological and geophysical measurements in Karisimbi with a view to undertaking exploratory drilling in 2011.

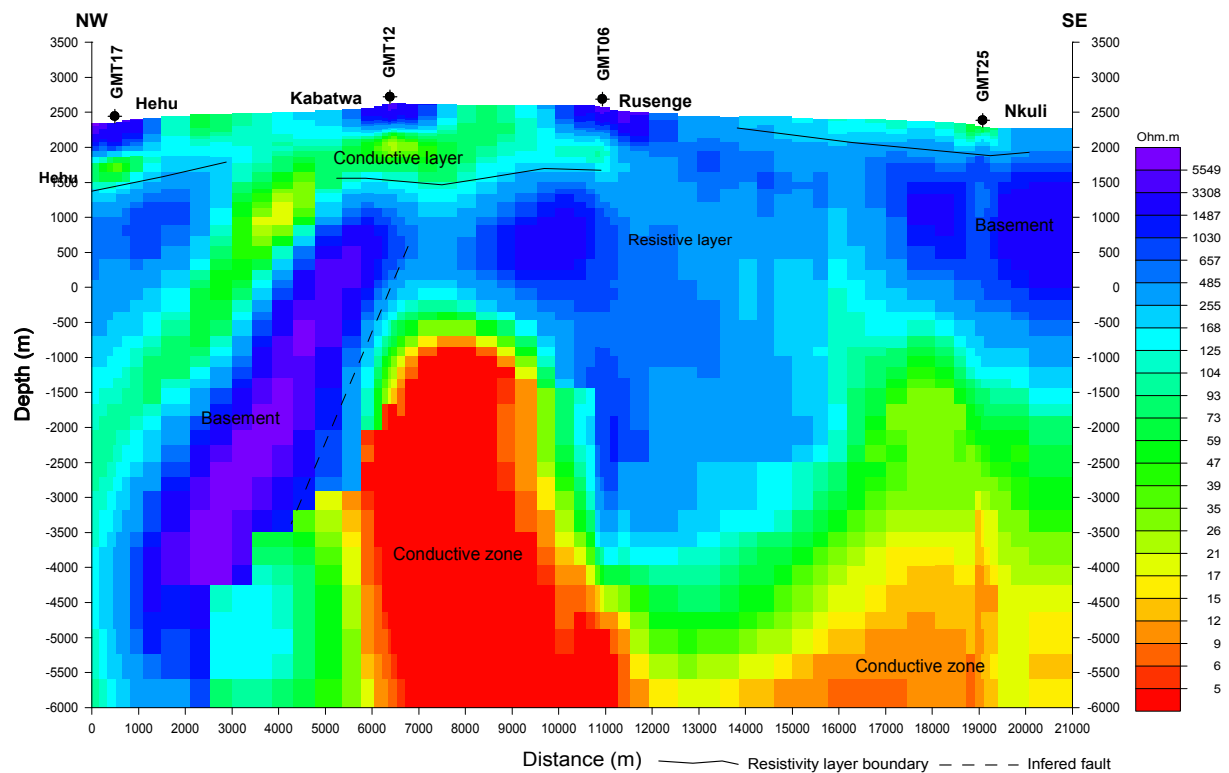


FIGURE 14: Geothermal model of Karisimbi volcano

### 2.4.3 DR Congo

Volcanism started 12 Ma at Virunga and has continued to the present time with Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira being some of the most active volcanoes in Africa. The Virunga complex covers a larger area in DR Congo than in Rwanda and Uganda as described in the earlier sections.

Geothermal manifestations occur in many areas within and near Virunga volcanic field. At Kiabukwa within the Upemba incipient rift, a 0.2MW<sub>e</sub> binary plant was installed in 1952. However, the plant stopped operation after only two years due to lack of proper maintenance.

## 2.5 South-western Branch

The south-western branch of the western rift follows geological structures along mobile belts from Lake Tanganyika into southern DR Congo and Zambia then south-westward into the Okavango rift system in northwest Botswana. The rift is non magmatic in its entire length, however, faults are evident along the entire length of the rift. However, rift structures in the Okavango have been identified only through geophysical techniques (Atekwana et al., 2004).

### 2.5.1 Zambia

Geothermal activity in Zambia and southern DR Congo occurs within the southwestern rift. The geothermal manifestations that include hot springs occur at Kapisya that discharge at 85°C near Lake Tanganyika and also near Lake Mweru. Other springs occur at Chinyunyu (60°C) near Lusaka (Figures 1 and 15).





FIGURE 15: Map of Zambia showing the location of Kapisya and Chinyunyu geothermal areas

The Italian government in 1987 funded a mini geothermal pilot power plant (200 KW) at Kapisya hot springs located at the shores of Lake Tanganyika. The plant was installed on the basis of limited exploration work, and it never became operational. ZESCO has signed an MOU with KenGen to assist in refurbishing and commissioning of the plant after being idle for 20 years. As part of the agreement, KenGen and ZESCO carried out detailed scientific investigations at Kapisya and Chinyunyu which revealed that the geothermal systems follow the fault plane model where the heat is due to deep circulation along the rift structures (Figure 13). It is estimated that each of the prospects can generate up to  $2\text{MW}_e$  using binary technology (Omenda et al. 2007).

### 2.5.2 Malawi

Malawi is located in the western arm of the greater Eastern African system that extends from Afar triple junction to Beira in Mozambique. Much of Malawi is made up of igneous and metamorphic rocks of the Basement Complex of Precambrian age. Parts of the country are created by Karoo strata and by Cretaceous igneous and sedimentary rocks and alluvium occurs along Lake Malawi.

The Rumphi-Nkhata Bay area where Chiwondo, Chiweta, Mawira and Kasitu geothermal prospects are located is underlain by gneisses, schist and granites of the Malawi Basement Complex of Lower Palaeozoic age (Fig. 16). In the western and central portions, there are scattered outliers of Karoo sediments (Figure ). Tertiary sediments occur on the lake shore plains and a general superficial cover of residual soils, particularly on the western plains.

Geothermal manifestations in Malawi occur in form of mainly warm springs, hot springs, *Fimbristylis exilis* “geothermal grass”. Twenty one (21) major hot springs are reported in Malawi, in the Chitipa-Karonga area in the north to Chipudze in the southern region with the highest recorded temperature at 79.3°C. Discharge of gases is observed in some springs. They occur within the Malawian Rift Valley and the source of heat is the high heat fluxes from the crustal rocks due to conduction (Dulanya, 2006). Preliminary results from fluid geothermometry indicate that the reservoirs have temperatures of more than 160-250°C. A private company in Malawi has been concessioned the prospects and have signed an agreement with GDC to undertake detailed exploration in the prospects.

## 2.6 Comoros

The island is formed by two coalescing shield volcanoes of La Grille in the north and Karthala which is an active volcanic centre in the south (Figure 17). The lavas from Karthala are predominantly alkali basalts and probably represent low pressure fractionation from an alkali basalt magma chamber. The Karthala volcano has been erupting episodically, with the most recent volcanic eruptions in 2005 and 2007. These signify that a heat source for the geothermal system exists under the volcano.

The alignment of the volcanic centers and the occurrence of fumaroles indicate that the tectonic setting is controlled by NNE and NW trending structures. The structural trends show four distinct fault trends in the northwest-southeast, northeast-southwest, north-south and nearly east-west. It is not very well established which faults channel hot hydrothermal fluids. Preliminary results from MT indicate that a geothermal system exists under Karthala at temperatures of more than 250°C from gas geothermometry. The prospect has since been licensed to a private developer.

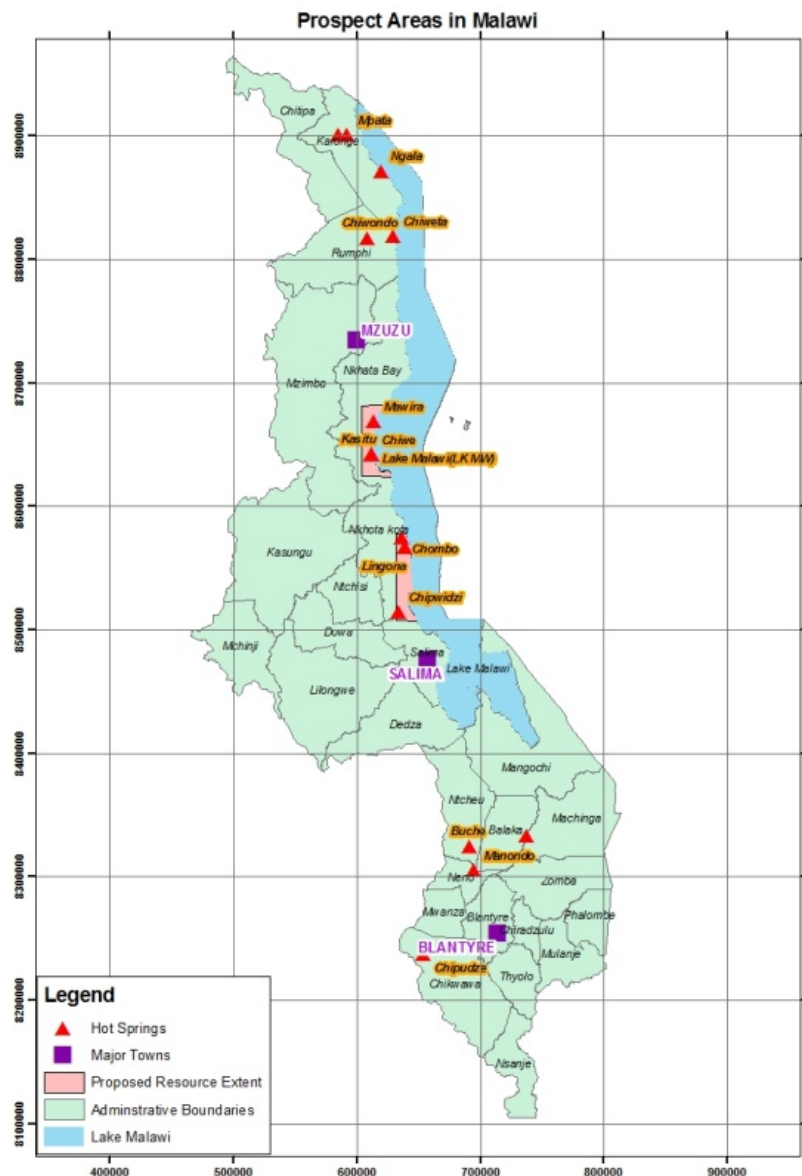


FIGURE 16: Map of Malawi geothermal prospects

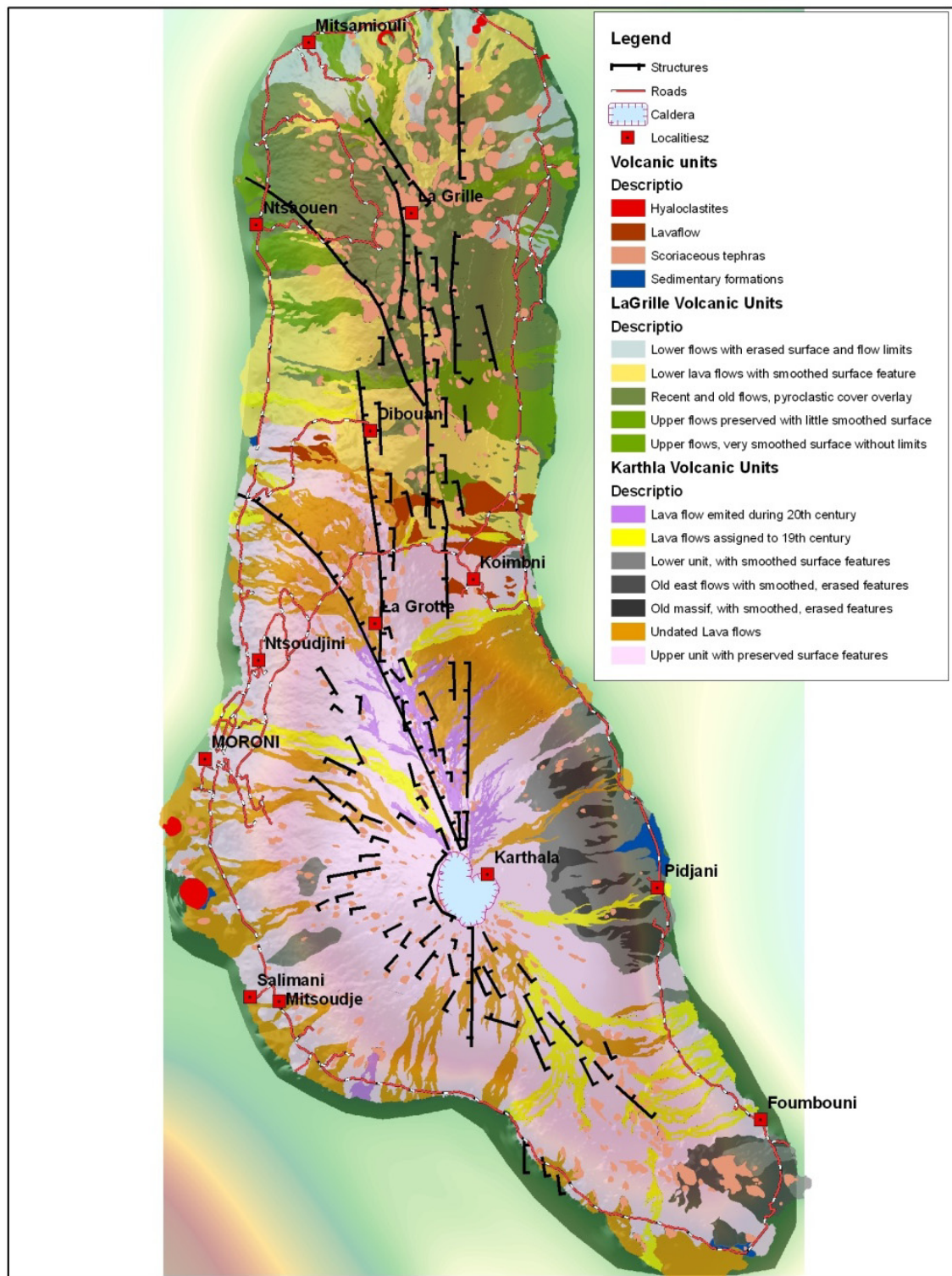


FIGURE 17: Map of Grand Comoro Island showing Karthala volcano

### 3. DISCUSSION

The geothermal activity in the East African rift system is closely tied to the occurrence of Quaternary volcanoes located within the axis of the rifts. The shield volcanoes are largely made of trachytes, rhyolites and associated pyroclastics. The presence of the silicic products attests to the occurrence of



shallow magma (fossil) bodies that are considered the most important heat sources for the associated geothermal systems. This is premised on the fact that since the eruptives are products of mainly protracted fractional crystallization, massive heat must have been conductively transferred to the upper reservoirs. Further, heat would be transferred where assimilation of crust occurs to a significant level as has been demonstrated at Olkaria (Omenda, 2000, Macdonald et al 1987).

Evidence for the occurrence of shallow magma bodies has been demonstrated at Olkaria, Suswa, Longonot and Menengai geothermal areas in Kenya where seismic waves show “gaps” at shallow levels (e.g. Figures 18 and 19). The seismic “gaps” signify the presence of molten bodies at about 7-10 km of the surface. Therefore, shallow magma bodies are the single most important heat sources for the volcano hosted high temperature geothermal resources in the East African rift.

Studies reveal that the crust under the EA rift ranges between 5km (Afar) and 35 km (Kenya) in thickness in the axis of the rift as compared to regions outside of the rift where the thickness is typically more than 45km (e.g. Prodehl et al., 1997; Simiyu and Keller, 1997; Figure 2). The thin crust and upwelling asthenosphere directly under the rift has resulted in generally high heat flow arising from high geothermal gradient within the entire length of the rift (Wheildon et al. 1994). Importance of asthenospheric heat would be more important in the Afar triple junction where the crust is less than 5km thick.

Deep circulation of ground waters through the master rift faults would mine heat from the rocks and upflow through the axial regions of the rift. Deep circulation has been indicated by the elevated boron contents of the fumaroles in some prospects in Kenya (Clarke et al., 1990, Dunkley et al, 1993, Geotermica Italiana, 1987). This deep groundwater circulation coupled with enhancement by young dike intrusions or plutons could explain some of the geothermal resources that occur outside of the quaternary volcanic centres in the rift and those in old terrains as in Kapisya and Chinyunyu in Zambia and western Uganda geothermal areas (Figure 20).

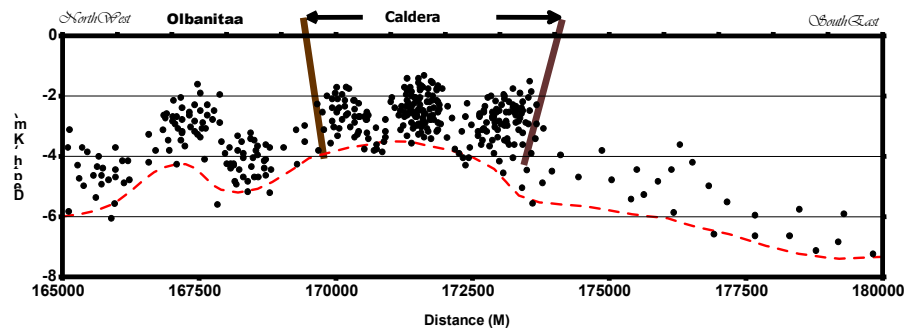


FIGURE 18: Seismic section across Menengai volcano (After Simiyu and Keller, 1997)

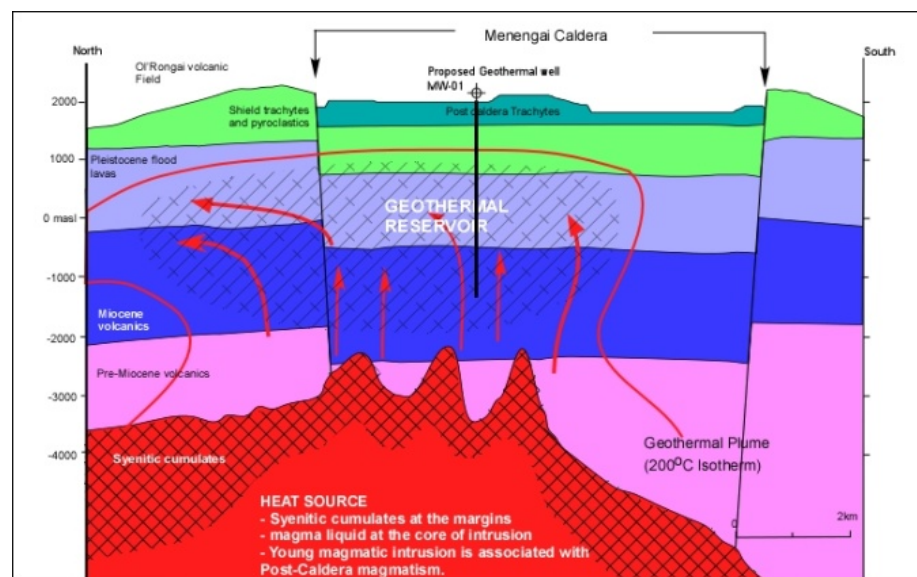


FIGURE 19: The W-E conceptualized geothermal model of Menengai geothermal prospect based on geology, gravity, seismics and MT data

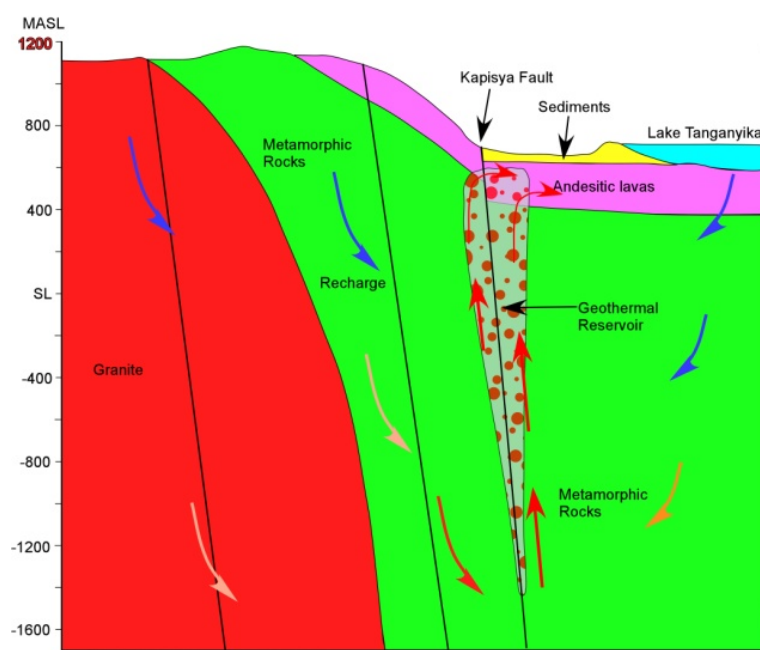


FIGURE 18: Geothermal model of the Kapisya geothermal system in Zambia

The main recharge for the geothermal systems in the East African rift, as has been determined by stable isotopes, originates largely from the flanks of the rifts. These regions are generally at higher elevations, wetter and are cut by faults parallel and oblique to the rift structural trends. Recharge would, therefore occur via the rift master faults and channelled to the rift axis by the oblique faults that cut through the rift faults (Abebe, 2000, Omenda, 1998, 1994). The high elevation ensures deep circulation through the master faults to the hot rocks. However, studies at Olkaria indicate that rift axial recharge is also important but mainly affects the upper parts of the geothermal reservoirs i.e. less than 1,000 m depth (Omenda and Karingithi, 2004).

Geothermal reservoirs in the Ethiopian and Kenya Rifts are mainly hosted within the faulted and layered Plio-Pleistocene rift volcanics. The permeability in such systems is due to fractures/faults and lithologic contacts. It is also thought that fractures caused by domal intrusion could also be important in enhancing permeability in some fields (Woldegiorgis et al. 2003). However, for the case of the geothermal resources in western branch of the rift, the reservoirs are largely hosted within the Precambrian metamorphic rocks where secondary permeability associated with faults and fractures are important.

The capping formation for the volcano hosted geothermal systems in the rifts is often a combination of lava flows and pyroclastics and shales and other sediments form capping formations in the Afar region where the volcanic products overlie sedimentary formations (Mohamed, 2003).

## REFERENCES

- Abebe, T., 2000: Geologicval limitations of a geothermal system in a continental rift zone: example of the Ethiopian rift valley. *Proceedings of World Geothermal Congress*, 2025-2030.
- Atekwana, E.A., Hogan, J.P., Kampunzu, A.B. and Modisi, M.P., 2004: Early structural evolution of the nascent Okavango rift zone, NW Botswana. *Proceedings of the East African Rift system: Geodynamics, Resources, and Environment conference*, Addis Ababa, 12-16.
- Bahati, G. and Tuhumire J., 2002: *Geothermal Energy in Uganda*. Geological Survey of Uganda.
- Bahati, G., 2003: *Geochemical exploration of the Katwe-Kikorongo, Buranga and Kibiro geothermal areas*, Geological Survey of Uganda.
- Baker, B.H., Williams, L.A.J, Miller, J.A. and Fitch, F.J., 1971: Sequence and geochronology of the Kenya rift volcanics. *Tectonophysics*, 11, 191-215.

- Baker, B.H. and Wohlebnberg, J., 1971: Structural evolution of the Kenya rift valley. *Nature*, 229, 538-542.
- Black, S., Macdonald, R. and Kelly, M.R., 1997: Crustal origin for the peralkaline rhyolites from Kenya: evidence from U-series disequilibria and Th-isotopes. *Journ. Petrol.*, 38, 277-297.
- Business Council for Sustainable Energy (2003): Market Assessment Report. *East African Geothermal "Market Acceleration" Conference, April 2003, Nairobi, Kenya.*
- Clarke, M.C.G., Woodhall, D.G., Allen, D. and Darling, G., 1990: *Geological, volcanological and hydrogeological controls of the occurrence of geothermal activities in the area surrounding Lake Naivasha, Kenya*. Min. of Energy, Kenya Govt. and British Geological Survey, 138 pp.
- Data, G. and Godfrey Bahati, 2003: *The chemistry of geothermal waters from areas outside the active volcanic belt, SW-Uganda.*
- Dulanya, Z., 2006: Geothermal Resources of Malawi – an Overview. *Thirty- First Workshop on Geothermal Reservoir Engineering.*
- Dunkley, P.N., Smith, M., Allen, D.J. and Darling, W.G., 1993: *The geothermal activity and geology of the northern sector of the Kenya Rift Valley*. British Geological Survey Research Report SC/93/1.
- Ebinger, C.J., 1989: Tectonic development of the western branch of the East African rift system. *Geol. Soc. Am. Bull.*, 101, 885-903.
- Geotermica Italiana srl UN/GoK, 1987a: *Supplement of surface investigations within the caldera volcanoes of Longonot and Suswa volcanoes*. UN/DTCD and MERD report.
- Geotermica Italiana srl UN/GoK, 1987b: *Geothermal Reconnaissance Survey in the Menengai-Bogoria area of the Kenya Rift Valley*. Volume 1-5.
- Geothermal Energy Association, 1999: *Geothermal Energy, the Potential for clean power from the earth.*
- Macdonald, R., Davies, G.R., Bliss, C.M., Leat, P.T., Bailey, D.K. and Smith, R.L., 1987: Geochemistry of high silica peralkaline rhyolites, Naivasha, Kenya rift valley. *Journal of Petrology*, 28, 979-1008.
- Mohamed, J., 2003: An overview of the geothermal prospects in the Republic of Djibouti: results and perspectives. *Proceedings of 2<sup>nd</sup> KenGen Geothermal conference, Nairobi Kenya*, 10-16.
- Mohr, C.K. and Wood, C.A., 1976: Volcano spacing and lithospheric attenuation in the Eastern Rift of Africa. *Earth and Planet. Sci. Letters*, 33, 126-144.
- Michael, A., 2005: Country Update on Geothermal Energy in Eritrea. *Proceedings in the World Geothermal Congress, 2005, Antalya, Turkey.*
- Mohr, P. and Zanettin, B., 1988: The Ethiopian flood basalt province. In: Macdougall, J.D. (Ed), *Continental Flood Basalts*. Kluwer Acad. Dord., 63-110.
- Mohr, P., 1992: Nature of the crust beneath magmatically active continental rifts. *Tectonophysics*, 213, 269-284.
- Mosley, P.N., 1993: Geological evolution of the late Proterozoic "Mozambique belt" of Kenya. *Tectonophysics*, 221, 223-250.
- Mwangi, M., 2005: Country Update on Geothermal Energy in Kenya. *Proceedings in the World Geothermal Congress, 2005, Antalya, Turkey.*



- Newell, D., Rohrs, D. and Lifa, J., 2006: *Preliminary Assessment of Rwanda's Geothermal Energy Development potential*. A report for the Government of Rwanda.
- Omenda, P.A., 1994: The geological structure of the Olkaria West geothermal field, Kenya. *Stanford Geothermal Reservoir Engineering Workshop*, 19, 125-130.
- Omenda, P.A., 1998: The geology and structural controls of the Olkaria geothermal system, Kenya. *Geothermics*, 27, 1.
- Omenda, P.A., 2000: Anatectic origin for comendite in Olkaria geothermal field, Kenya rift: geochemical evidence for syenitic protolith. *African Journ. Sci. Technology*, 1, pp39-47.
- Omenda, P.A and Karingithi, C., 2004: Hydrogeological characteristics of Olkaria geothermal system based on secondary minerals, stable isotopes and fluid chemistry. In *Proceedings of 3<sup>rd</sup> KenGen Geothermal conference, Nairobi*, 33-38.
- Omenda P., Wambugu, J., Wameyo, P., Mburu, W., Mboya, T., Shako, I., Sichande, E., Mfula, D., Sinyinza, A., 2007: Results of Geoscientific Investigations of Kapisya and Chinyunyu Geothermal Fields, Zambia. *Proceedings of KenGen Technical Seminar*. Internal Report (Restricted).
- Prodehl, C., Fuchs, K. and Mechie, J., 1997: Seismic-refraction studies of the Afro-Arabian rift system – a brief review. *Tectonophysics*, 278, 1-13.
- Simiyu, S.M., 1996: *Integrated geophysical study of the southern Kenya rift*. Ph.D dissertation, Univ. of Texas at El Paso, pp. 250.
- Simiyu, S.M. and Keller, G.R., 1997: An integrated analysis of lithospheric structure across the East African plateau based on gravity anomalies and recent seismic studies. In: Structure and dynamic processes in the lithosphere of the Afro-Arabian rift system. Fuchs, K., Altherr, R., Muller, B. and Prodehl, C. (eds.). *Tectonophysics*, 278, 291-313.
- Smith, M. and Mosley, P., 1993: Crustal heterogeneity and basement influence on the development of the Kenya rift, East Africa. *Tectonics*, 12, 591-606.
- Teklemariam, M. and Beyene, K., 2005: Country Update on Geothermal Energy in Ethiopia. *Proceedings in the World Geothermal Congress, 2005, Antalya, Turkey*.
- Teklemariam, M., 2005: *Overview of Geothermal resource utilization and potential in East African rift system*. UNU 2005 Training for ArGeo, Kenya.
- UNDP, 1973: *Geology, Geochemistry and hydrology of the East Africa Rift System within Ethiopia*. DDSF/ON/116, United Nations New York.
- Wheildon, J., Morgan, P., Williamson, K.H., Evans, T.T., and Swanberg, C.A., 1994: Heat flow in the Kenya Rift zone. *Tectonophysics*, 236, 131-149.
- Woldegiorgis, L., Clynne, M.A., Duffield, W.A., Fournier, R.O., Janik, C.J., Kahsai, G., Lowenstern, J.B., Woldemariam, K., Smith, J.G., and Tesfai, T., 2003: Geothermal potential of the Alid Volcanic Center, Danakil Depression, Eritrea. *Proc. 2<sup>nd</sup> KenGen Geothermal conference, Nairobi Kenya*, 1-9.